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Irresponsible Intelligence Queries

Perhaps the most extraordinary intrusion into the operations of the armed services — an action which, if completed, could impair the future gathering of military intelligence — was revealed this week. It became known that the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had sent a letter to Secretary of State Dean Rusk demanding a detailed report of the intelligence-collection plans of the United States government involving naval vessels.

Up to now, intelligence activities of the military forces have been described only in general terms and certain phases have been explained in confidence to the Senate Armed Services Committee. But there has never been a request for the publication of details such as Senator J. William Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas, asked for in his four-page questionnaire. These include "information which individual members desire."

While the secretary of state can decline to provide answers on the ground that to do so is not in the public interest, the fact that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has interjected itself into military operations cannot but have a psychological effect abroad and reflect unfavorably on the United States.

The letter sent by Fulbright seeks a "complete description of the development of the intelligence-collection plan which included the use of the *Pueblo* and other vessels," together with the name of the "highest official in the United States government who is aware of the

day-to-day operations" of such ships and the number of vessels which are "capable of this type of activity." It also questions the need for sending ships as close as 13 nautical miles to the coastline of another country.

Not satisfied with a request for general information, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman asks for disclosure of "what agency or agencies have operational responsibility for the *Pueblo*," along with "copies of all operational instructions and mission concepts relating to the *Pueblo*." He requests, too, a "full description of all intelligence equipment aboard the *Pueblo*" and of "the skills, training and affiliation of all personnel" on the ship.

Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, Democratic leader of the Senate and a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, apparently was not too happy with the letter. When he heard about it, he said:

"Some questions can't be answered. We ought to move very carefully in some of these extremely sensitive areas if we expect the fullest operational capability in what is involved."

"We can't expect everything they have because that might be giving information too sensitive to people only too glad to have it in other countries."

The Fulbright letter states that it "is being circulated to all the members of the committee," but there is no indication of how many saw its text beforehand. The request involves delicate questions. Nothing could be more harmful to the gathering of intelli-

gence than to have the methods publicized by the Congress of the United States, including publication of details about equipment and the names of the persons in this country who actually are charged with the responsibility of supervising such operations.

The collecting of secret information is one of the most difficult tasks confronting the military services. There are intelligence units in the Army as well as in the Navy and the Air Force which are entirely separate from the Central Intelligence Agency, but all cooperate for one purpose — to get information essential to the successful operation of America's armed forces. Intelligence data often can be of crucial importance in military planning and can help save the lives of America's fighting men.

Partisan politics has certainly reached a critical point when even the party in power apparently cannot restrain its own members in the Senate from seeking to publicize information of a sensitive character. This could not happen under the parliamentary system. For the leadership would have to approve of such a step. Indeed, the chairman of a committee would not be permitted to remain in that post one day after he had written a letter of this kind if he had not obtained in advance the approval of the majority leader. Under the American system, on the other hand, there is irresponsibility in such matters, and the party in power seems helpless to discipline its own members.

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